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ABSTRACT

Descriptions are given of two graduate level teacher education programs, at Memphis State University, Tennessee, which have teaching experience components relying heavily on mentoring as a support system for preservice teachers. The Master of Arts in Teaching program provides three teaching experiences which build to a fourth, 5-month long experience. Students work with two mentors who observe, advise and guide: a pedagogical specialist who is a college of education faculty member, and an experienced public school teacher who teaches in the same content area and school as the intern. In the Lyndhurst Program, which involves a 9-month internship, students are assigned to work with three mentors who observe, advise, and guide--a practitioner, a pedagogical specialist, and an arts and sciences specialist. In both programs the mentors are assigned to their proteges but the practitioner mentors are chosen by the public school systems with some input from college of education personnel. The pedagogical and arts and science mentors volunteer to be mentors, but final selection is made by project directors. This paper presents the perceptions held by the interns in these two programs regarding their mentoring relationships and what worked. (JD)

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Lessons Learned: Establishing Mentoring Roles in Two Preparation-Induction Programs Student Perspectives About What Works

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Lessons Learned: Establishing Mentoring Roles in Two Preparation-Induction Programs Student Perspectives About What Works

Carol Plata Etheridge

Recent reviews of literature on teacher induction (Lanier & Little, 1986; Little, 1984; Zeichner, 1983;) suggest that there is need of a support system for beginning teachers. This need is not new but has been receiving increased attention with mentoring being an attractive approach. Reviews of the mentoring literature by Galvez-Hjornevik (1985, 1986) and Lanier & Little (1986) suggest that studies of mentoring in education have focused primarily on mentoring during the first year of teaching rather than during teacher training. Further, several mentoring studies have analyzed whether mentoring exists among educators have investigated the value of mentoring and have examined how mentoring relationships develop. Good mentoring characteristics for education have been determined primarily through logic, review of literature in other professions, particularly business, or observations of mentor-protege relationships. Glidewell (1983) has shown, however, that 92 percent of beginning teachers do not directly seek help from colleagues. But few studies examine mentoring during teacher preparation or focus on factors that contribute to successful mentor-protege relationships

where beginning teachers feel free to seek help from colleagues.

Memphis State University has implemented two graduate level teacher education programs which have teaching experience components relying heavily on mentoring as a support system for preservice teachers. The Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program provides three teaching experiences which build to a fourth, five-month long experience called a teacher experience. Students are assigned to work with two mentors who observe, advise and guide; a pedagogical specialist who is a college of education faculty member and a practitioner who is a career level II or III (two highest levels attainable on the Tennessee Career Ladder) public school teacher who teaches in the same content area and school as the intern. Both mentor types observe, assist and evaluate the beginning teacher.

In the Lyndhurst Program students complete a nine month internship. The student is assigned to work with three mentors who observe, advise and guide; they are a practitioner, a pedagogical specialist, and an arts and sciences specialist. The practitioner mentor is a career level II or III public school teacher teaching in the same content area as the protege and in the same school with the intern. This mentor has the closest and most frequent contacts with the intern. The pedagogical mentor is a

college of education faculty member who also evaluates the protege's progress. The arts and science mentor is a faculty member in the college of Arts and Sciences who teaches in the same discipline area as the intern.

In both programs the mentors are assigned to their proteges but the practitioner mentors are chosen by the public school systems with some input from college of education personnel. The pedagogical and arts and science mentors volunteer to be mentors but final selection is made by project directors. This paper will present the perceptions held by the interns in these two programs regarding their mentoring relationships and what worked.

Methodology

Discussion in this paper result from data gathered from twenty-three subjects - twelve MAT interns and eleven Lyndhurst proteges - who completed the first cycle of either the MAT or Lyndhurst programs. Upon completion of their internships, proteges were asked to complete a questionnaire which asked them, among other things, to rate their mentor-protege relationships regarding degree of success. Each protege was interviewed after completing the questionnaire and was asked the open-ended questions: What made the mentor-protege relationship successful? What hindered the relationship? What other, non-assigned mentoring relationships did you establish? This paper

presents the perceptions of proteges regarding major factors that they perceived as contributing to successful mentor-protege relationships.

Factors Contributing to Protege Success

Asked to rate how successful the mentor-protege relationships were on a scale of one to five (1 = successful, 5 = unsuccessful), most of the twenty-three proteges rated the mentor-protege relationships to be successful (see Table 1). Interview data revealed factors which proteges felt affected the relationships.

Assigned Mentors. Every protege voiced some concern, initially, about having mentors assigned to them. They felt that because of the close nature of mentoring relationships, mentors should be chosen by the intern and not forced by the institution. After internships were completed, however, most said that they were surprised that their mentor-protege relationship worked out so well.

Initial Contacts. The initial meetings and contacts between mentor and protege set the tone for the relationship particularly with the practitioner and arts and science mentors. Generally the proteges expected the arts and science mentors to initiate contacts even though the proteges were told to do the initiating. In some cases the protege already knew the arts and science mentor from previously taken coursework at the university; these initial

contacts were done easily and successfully. In other cases where the pair had not met previously and the protege tried several times to make contact without success the protege was frustrated, resentful and tended not to make use of this mentor.

Initial meetings with the practitioner mentors went smoothly and provided a firm foundation for the relationship when the mentor knew to expect the protege. However, because of communication breakdowns within the school systems, in several cases the proteges arrived at their schools and introduced themselves to their practitioner mentors only to have the mentors say they did not know they were getting a protege. In one case, the mentor said she did not want a protege. These relationships had rocky beginnings that were usually overcome, however, proteges in these situations said that they had to fight the sense that they were imposing on their mentors even though the mentors later assured them that they liked having a protege.

Accessibility. Accessibility, with regard to the practitioner mentor, was related to time available for the mentor to observe and conference with the protege as well as proximity of mentor and protege classrooms to each other in the school building. In instances, particularly in the Lyndhurst program, where proteges indicated less than desireable relationships they also said they seldom saw or talked with their mentors because the mentor had no release

time in which to interact with the protege. In other cases the mentor and protege were assigned to classrooms located in opposite ends of the school buildings or in separate, though adjacent, buildings making it difficult for them to interact.

The school systems viewed the Lyndhurst internship and, to a lesser degree, the MAT teaching experience more as opportunities to gain teaching staff rather than as helping teachers-in-training who need support. Whether release time is given to mentors for mentoring seems to be out of the control of university personnel.

When proteges talked about access to pedagogical or arts and science mentors they referred to ease with which those mentors could be contacted when they were needed. As long as a protege could call by telephone and confer with the mentor or ask the mentor to come to the school the protege's were satisfied and the relationship flourished as a helpful one. However, if difficulty was encountered in contacting these mentors or if the mentor could not come out to the school within a day or two of a request the relationship, from the protege's view, was inadequate and they did not use these mentors for resources or support.

Role Expectations. The proteges in both programs expected to be treated as teachers rather than students. In some cases they felt the practitioner mentors were treating them as students, not granting the autonomy the proteges

felt they should have. This was more of a problem with MAT proteges than Lyndhurst possibly because Lyndhurst proteges were teacher-of-record for their own classes from the first day of school. MAT proteges became teacher-of-record beginning second semester. Their mentors gave up two of the classes they had been teaching first semester thus, some confused the teaching experience which was designed to be an independent but supported experience with student teaching where the student is less autonomous.

Two extremes in mentoring behaviors were exhibited by practitioner mentors. Some mentors were reticent to give up their classes and hovered over the protege and frequently observed the protege's teaching over the entire semester. These were usually mentors from the MAT program. Others, exhibiting a sink or swim philosophy, never bothered with the protege unless the protege asked for assistance or advice. These were more likely to be mentors from the Lyndhurst program. Both extremes were disliked by the proteges though those who had immediate independence said they liked not being bothered. However, after the internship, those who experienced greater and immediate independence felt they would have done better in their teaching had the mentor observed and given feedback more often.

Placement Flexibility. Students in the Lyndhurst program were in their placements permanently for the entire

school year. If a positive mentor-protege relationship was not established with the practitioner there were neither plans nor attempts to find a new teaching setting or practitioner mentor. In some cases where the relationship was not good the proteges adapted to their situations by finding other support and ultimately had successful experiences. In other cases the proteges struggled through the entire experience and said they might have had more successful learning experiences if they had had different practitioner mentors.

The MAT program allowed more flexibility with regard to mentor-protege assignments. When the mentor-protege pair were not able to work together, adjustments were made early in the teaching experience. In three cases, proteges, after indicating problems, were assigned to new mentors and they reported the change was for the positive and attributed their successful experiences to their mentors. In one instance, mentor-protege problems were not reported until late in the teaching experience - too late for adjustments. This protege complained that the mentor was not helpful and thus resulted in a less successful teaching experience.

Evaluation. Proteges complained that the evaluation role of the pedagogical mentors interfered with developing an open relationship. However there was no evidence to suggest that weak relationships resulted from this factor.

Other Factors

A number of factors were identified by proteges in both programs relating to successful mentor-protege relationships. First, mentor flexibility was viewed as important. Mentors who could allow their protege to develop their own style rather than become a clone of the mentor were viewed as highly competent. Second, proteges wanted their mentors to be informative regarding: teaching ideas related to methods; getting along with key people like administrators, parents, and other teachers in the school; use of machines; locating materials; and learning nuts and bolts aspects of teaching like record keeping, grading procedures and other school or system policies.

Third, proteges wanted their mentors to include them in out-of-the-ordinary activities such as special field trips with students or training seminars for teachers. No protege said they expected their mentor to help them get jobs though some indicated the mentors helped in this regard.

Non-assigned Relationships

When surveyed, most interns reported that they did not establish other, non-assigned, mentoring relationships. However, interviews revealed that sources usually supplemental to the mentor, but sometimes replacing the mentor, developed. The primary and most prolific source of helpers and information was from the teacher's lounge. In

some cases the mentoring teacher took the protege to the lounge where introductions were made. Usually the proteges, on their own, met other teachers in the lounge. Many proteges had no assigned space at which to work; they spent off periods in the teacher's lounge where they naturally met other teachers and developed secondary mentoring relationships.

Others of these relationships resulted when the proteges observed in classrooms or met others in the supply or work rooms. These did not occur as frequently as lounge relationships, however.

Usually the proteges used these other, non-assigned, relationships for sources of information the assigned practitioner mentors failed to give or that the proteges felt the assigned mentors did not have the time to give. The proteges, both MAT and Lyndhurst, were very sensitive to not taking up too much of their assigned practitioner mentor's time.

Discussion

It seems, from the students' perspectives, that assigned mentor-protege pairings can and do work. However, if the new teacher is to experience maximum gain from the teaching experience, maintaining the option to change pairings seems to be necessary for those few mentor-protege

pairs that cannot, or do not, develop a good working relationship.

In the students' view, several factors facilitate the working relationship of the mentor-protege pair. First, if the paired relationships are to be successful mentors should know ahead that they will be mentors. Second, having mentors and proteges meet prior to the protege beginning work in the school would facilitate the working relationship of the pair. Further, mentors should be oriented to their mentoring roles within the context of the program in which the proteges are working. Use of practitioner mentors requires good working relationships and strong lines of communication with the public school system if the mentor is to have the system support for carrying out the mentoring roles.

Accessibility is also important to the successful mentor-protege relationship. Thus, practitioner mentors who have release time from teaching can observe and conference with the protege which maximizes protege learning. Further, conferences and observations are facilitated if the pair is housed in the same proximity of the school building. Where mentors from a university are used arrangements should be made whereby proteges can leave messages for those mentors and upon receiving a message, the mentor should contact the protege within a day or two.

In both the MAT and Lyndhurst programs, most proteges found other teachers in the school to supplement the assistance they received from teachers but these individuals seldom replaced the assigned practitioner mentors. It will be interesting to explore whether they will seek similar assistance when they are in their first year of teaching without an organized support system.

Table 1

Intern ratings of success of mentor-protege relationships

	successful 1 n/%	2 n/%	3 n/%	4 n/%	unsuccessful 5 n/%	missing
Pedagogic Mentor*	11/47.8	5/23	2/8.6	4/17	1/4	1/4
Classroom Mentor*	15/65	3/13	2/8.6		3/13	
Arts & Science Mentor**	6/54.5		2/18		1/9	2/18

* N = 23
** N = 11

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